

October 5, 2011

Winnepesaukee-Opechee-Winnisquam Trail Field Review



Left to Right: **Allan Beetle**, WOW trail; **Rick Ball**, Town of Belmont Town Planner; **Luke Powell**, City of Laconia Assistant Director of Public Works; **Diane Hanley**, WOW Trail and Event Organizer; **Eric Senecal** Lakes Region Planning commission; **Matt Lahey**, Laconia City Council (Ward 2); **Michael Kitch**, Laconia Daily Sun; **Charles Martin**, Northern Rail Trail and **Brian Lombard**, New Hampshire Department of Transportation at the Laconia Railroad Station look south toward the area proposed for the Phase 2 WOW Trail segment.



WOW Trail just north of Messer Street, looking south back toward Messer St.

Review Overview:

Participants gathered at the Meredith Savings Bank's Conference Room for a day of field review, information sharing and collaboration toward the continuation of WOW Trail

development. **Carmen Lorentz**, Director of the Belknap County Economic Development Council, noted that “The WOW Trail is revitalizing Laconia and the regional trail system that it will be connected to is likely to enhance the regional tourism economy.” Laconia City Manager **Scott Myers** noted that the City continues to support the trail as a vital asset to the community as a linear park connecting neighborhoods businesses, employers, residents and recreation facilities.



Above: Murals at Moulton Street - Looking south at the existing section of rail with trail.



Above: Looking North from Moulton Street toward Elm Street.



Looking north from the North Main Street trailhead.

After Diane Hanley led a brief exhibition of the existing mile of completed rail with trail, Brian Lombard escorted participants south along the “Phase 2” rail with trail section of WOW trail.



Just south of North Main Street, the railroad passes by the Laconia Railroad Station. Brian Lombard indicated that typical fencing in this area to separate the sidewalk and the railroad may not apply at this location due to the context as a passenger platform.



Looking north from the North Main Street trailhead back toward the Pleasant Street crossing.

Prior to the field review, Brian Lombard had notified railroad leases about the planned walk. The notification allowed the group to safely review the corridor for the specific time. While trespassing is illegal along the railroad property, the group noted about a dozen incidents of trespass by others not involved in the field review, including the man walking in the middle of the rails, above. Charles Martin pointed out that the man walking seeks for the best place in the corridor to travel, which is usually in the middle of the active mainline rail. The man would walk on a nearby trail if one were available, according to Dr. Martin. "This is why rail with trail is safer than rail without trail."



Field Participants explore the feasibility of detouring off a former railroad siding on the west side of the railroad corridor alignment in the event that preservation and avoidance of two historic railroad buildings located north of Water Street becomes necessary.



Above: A paved sidewalk that leaves the west side of the railroad corridor about 300 feet north of the Water Street crossing. The path might be considered in the event that avoidance of two historic buildings north of Water Street becomes necessary.



Looking north from the Water Street crossing, toward the location where the two small abandoned railroad buildings sit.



Above: On property bounded by Water Street, Fair Street and the Winnepesaukee River, participants discuss the engineering feasibility of a potential trail easement (should the property owner agree) along the river to connect the trail across the Winnisquam River via the Fair Street bridge. Participants suggested that a trail through the property along the river might enhance the property of a willing owner.



On the south side of the Fair Street crossing, participants generally agreed that the Trail should continue on the west side of the railroad corridor. Allan Beetle of the WOW Trail, left, had earlier noted that “the Trail has over 100 local sponsors and hundreds of volunteers already. There is strong community interest in seeing this trail system accomplished.”



Looking north toward Fair Street: Brian Lombard explained the problems with using the east side of the corridor. The east side of the railroad at this point was storing water on this day and is likely wetland.



Looking west along a foot path across the corridor (legal crossing): The footpath connects the end of Keasor Court off Court Street with a City Beach on Lake Winnisquam. The trail would make the beach safely accessible to children from many additional City neighborhoods.



Looking north, just south of the Keasor Court public beach foot crossing: The rail with trail would run between a property with spectacular views and a Lake Winnisquam beach. Ms. Hanley explained that a requirement for a chain link fence would substantially detract from this property both because of the impaired lake view that would result and the decreased property owner accessibility to the private beach. The prospect of a chain link fence between homes and the lake front foments otherwise unnecessary property owner opposition to the trail. Luke Powell asked if the Department would consider a more aesthetic fence type that complements the spectacular scenery while accommodating property owner passage across the corridor. Brian Lombard indicated this location may warrant a more attractive barrier such as split rail fencing.



With the spectacular Lake Winnisquam as a backdrop, NHDOT Engineer Brian Lombard measures the limits of the Railroad corridor property.



The trail would leave the corridor at this point along the Lake Winnisquam water front and connect up to a short section of existing multi-use trail at the Laconia/Belmont line that was constructed by the City of Laconia over ten years ago. The multi-use trail connects the sidewalk along the west side of Court Street to the Belknap Mall shopping development. The Belmont Trail group's current plan is to use the multi use path to the Belmont Beach driveway (opposite the south end of the Laconia Bypass).



Rick Ball of the Town of Belmont explained that the Town has been asked to repair about 100 feet of chain link fence damaged by a run-off-the-road vehicle from Court Street. Given the specific conditions shown at this site, participants questioned the need for the fence at this location. Participants felt that a significant length of the fence, including this damaged section, could safely be removed resulting in a more aesthetic trail. The only protection likely to aid trail users here is protection from automobiles running off of the highway onto the trail.



Rick Ball of the Belmont Recreational Alternative Transportation Team (B.R.A.T.T.) explains that the trail route in Belmont would continue across the Belmont Beach Town Driveway, follow a wood road south of the driveway for about 500 feet and then run on new trail corridor continuing generally south through the existing woods.



Laconia Recreation Director **Kevin Dunleavy** leads participants back from Belmont toward downtown Laconia via the alternate Court Street route. There is no shoulder refuge for cyclists. The narrow sidewalk is in poor condition for pedestrians. The sidewalk is interrupted at several locations by private signs and other obstructions. While a road diet might improve walking and bicycling conditions along Court Street, participants generally agreed that the WOW trail would still be a welcome alternative for many pedestrians and novice cyclists.



Participants felt that a “Phase 3” rail-with-trail crossing of the Winnepesaukee River includes too many costs to be considered feasible. Luke Powell, Diane Hanley and Kevin Dunleavy agreed that this existing Gold Street pedestrian bridge, accessed via Railroad Avenue, would be a viable route for the trail to reach locations east of Elm Street.



Looking north: The Phase 3 trail would run on-road along Sheridan Street for at least a few blocks. Participants felt that the trail could return to rail-with-trail at this location at the Appleton Street Crossing, thereby completely bypassing a rail drawbridge crossing of the Winnepesaukee River.



Looking North: This Massachusetts Avenue crossing appears to be another possibility for the return to the corridor from city streets. While the on-Sheridan Street portion of the route would be longer with the Massachusetts Avenue crossing, the grades were substantially easier when continuing along Sheridan Street to Massachusetts Avenue, just a few blocks past Appleton Street.

[Links to Aerial Maps of the WOW Trail
Belmont area](#)

[Downtown Laconia area](#)

[Lakeport area](#)

[Weirs area](#)

The Department thanks Diane Hanley for organizing this review.

Respectfully submitted by Larry Keniston, Intermodal Facilities Engineer, Rail and Transit Bureau, New Hampshire Department of Transportation, 7 Hazen Drive Concord, New Hampshire, 03302 (603) 271-1668 www.bikeped.nh.gov